

DRYDEN'S FABLE
OF
THE HIND AND THE PANTHER

CONSIDERED WITH REGARD
TO THE ECCLESIASTICAL POLICY
OF JAMES THE SECOND

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Times were troublesome in England when James the Second was at the head of the nation. In 1685—1688 the royal power made efforts for the last time to undermine the liberties and rights of the nation, political as well as personal and religious, it tried every means to establish an absolute government at the expense of national privileges and prerogatives of the parliament. It is well known that James the Second did not meet with success. The constitution of England proceeded save, even strengthened from the conflict, and never since a king of England could succeed to modify it in favour of the crown. That short reign of James the Second, as it is worthy already for this political reason to be studied with the greatest attention, seems no less important to an ecclesiastical historian and to every one who takes an interest in the history of development of the Church of England. James the Second, the last of the sovereign Stuarts and as I believe, the least too, was also the last king of England confessing himself a Catholic. He, the last, tried to overthrow the edifice of Established Church and to convert by force or unconstitutional means the nation to Catholicism. —

Conviction, however, cannot be obtruded. It is obvious that those pertinacious attempts of converting the English nation to Catholicism have been the very cause of James' misfortune. Concerning matters of religion the irritability of an Englishman was prevailing at that time

every political sentiment. There is no reason to doubt that James was sincerely devoted to the Church of Rome, but not less unquestionable was the strongest attachment of the greatest part of the nation to the Established Church of England. And as for the Protestant Dissenters — they agreed (in conformity with every high-church man) in hating Catholic doctrines and ceremonies. Better auxiliaries, indeed, than money and force, corruption and persecution had been necessary to the success of James' ecclesiastical policy!

But the past, the history of the reign of his brother Charles, did it not authorize him to presume upon the willingness of the nation to join the Church of Rome? A short retrospect of the policy of Charles II. will clear this question.

Charles II. was a Catholic with all his heart. But he never durst to profess himself „a Papist“ before the nation. Though he always had the earnest desire to raise and to support his brethren in faith, he did not delay to revoke, to his own best, his own political measures and decrees when he saw himself to have passed the bounds of legality or moderation. In 1772, he had dispensed with the advice of the Cabal-ministry the Non-Conformists with the penal-laws only in order to favor the Catholics. This dispensation having been declared unconstitutional by the house of the Commons, was cancelled by his own hands and even, in 1773, he sanctioned that famous law called the Test by virtue of which every Englishman was obliged to forswear the transsubstantiation, before he was entitled to fill a public office. Since that time Catholics were excluded from the service of the state. James, then duke of York, resigned immediately as Lord High Admiral of England, manifesting thereby that he was a Catholic. The animosity against the Catholics was carried to the utmost when, in 1675, Titus

Oates, divine of the Anglican Church, confirmed by oath that a great conspiracy had been formed by the Catholics against the Church and the constitution of England.

The perjuries of this mad priest caused a bloody persecution of the Catholics, their exclusion from the parliament and the banishment of James from the court. And as he was considered the chief of the Catholic party in England, the Whigs predominating at that time in the house of Commons tried all means to exclude him from the succession to the throne. A bill of exclusion, indeed, passed twice the lower house, though it was always rejected by the Lords. Charles II. died in 1685. As he had no children, James had the best title to the throne. Nobody, indeed, did hinder him in taking possession of it.

There was, on the contrary, a great political party, the Tories, who were sincerely devoted to him, notwithstanding the difference of religious opinions. The whole priesthood of the Anglican Church, the mass of the gentry, all the royalist knights and esquires belonged to the Tory party. They all agreed in that famous principle of non-resistance. Predominating in both houses they had hailed James' accession to the throne; they all were willing to support their king in suppressing Whigs and Dissenters. As for the Whigs, the complete suppression of Monmouth's insurrection in the commencement of James' reign discouraged them. Those who had tried to exclude the duke of York from the throne, were dispersed and exiled. And concerning the Non-conformists, the rigor of the laws oppressed equally Presbyterians, Baptists, and Independants. — Catholics only were excepted. It was, however, the ultimate end of James' ardent desires to reestablish the Church of which he was a member. But when he saw that he could not succeed in sight of the circumstance that forty-nine fiftieths of the inhabitants

of England were zealous Protestants, he endeavoured to obtain at least for his fellowbelievers immunity from the penal-laws and civil disabilities, to bestow on them ecclesiastical and academical endowments. Influenced by the consideration that Catholics were not numerous in England, that their importance would increase by numerous and remarkable conversions, James spared no pains, no money, nothing, indeed, to make proselytes. Now and then he met with success. With the names of some wellknown members of the high nobility, of Anglican divines, of some writers and poets, there is to be mentioned the name of the greatest master of English poetry at that time, that of John Dryden.

John Dryden born in 1631 at Aldwinkle (Northamptonshire) is undoubtedly the greatest poet of the second half of the 17th century. Nobody will deny to Dryden the credit, at least not those critics of Johnson's and Walter Scott's political party that, if he has not founded a new School of English poetry, he at least raised satirical poetry to the highest perfection. But, to be true, it cannot be denied that a strong and real sentiment perhaps never participated Dryden when he composed his poems; that no intrinsic compulsion forced him to express his inmost sentiments and to communicate them to his nation. After having produced, in 1658, the „Heroic Stanzas on the Death of Oliver Cromwell“ he changed, in 1660, his political opinions and became a royalist. His loyal sentiments were expressed in „A Poem on the happy Restoration and Return of his most sacred Majesty King Charles the Second“, entitled: „Astrea Redux“. During Charles's reign he always supported the court-party and his satirical verses against the Whigs, especially in the crisis of the „Exclusion Bill“ answered well the royal purposes. He was, however, not held in such high estimation to be thought worthy of any court-

favor. But he became Poet-Laureate after the death of Davenant. When James accessed, in 1685, he seemed to be ignorant of the merits of that mighty satirical partisan of court-policy whose life hitherto had passed in want and exigencies. In 1685, Dryden turned Catholic. Instantly he was gratified with a pension of a hundred pounds a year. The sensation of the nation as it, indeed, may easily be conceived was great when it was reported that the «greatest master of English poetry» had joined the communion of the Church of Rome. Nobody, however, believed in the sincerity of the conversion, for the advantages to be, in 1686, a member of that Church were too obvious. Dryden's enemies did not fail to quote his satirical verses against „Popery“, written when there was nothing to be gained by turning Catholic.

Now, either of his own accord or by order of the king, he began to defend, in prose, Catholicism. But soon he had met with his match. He perceived that he was inferior in theological controversy to Stillingfleet's experience. Desiring, however, to become a victorious defender of Catholicism, or perhaps by order of the court (though he himself says the contrary), he composed during the winter (1686—1677) a new apology of the Catholic religion, but in a form in which he is said to have been superior to all his contemporaries.

A fortnight after James's „declaration of a general indulgence“, consequently about the 20th of April 1687 he had finished his new apology, entitled:

The Hind and the Panther. The fable of „the Hind and the Panther“ is an allegorical poem in three parts. — A milkwhite Hind „immortal and unchanged“ is the emblem of the Catholic Church. „Without unspotted, innocent within“ she is hated by all the animals living with her in the same forest. The „Quaking Hare“ professes a „timourous neutrality“, but the bloody „Indepen-

dent Boar in groans her hate expresses“; the „Baptist Boar“, the „Buffoon Ape“ (*Atheists*), the Wolf, emblem of the *Presbyterians*, they altogether agree in hating that innocent Hind. King James is represented under the similitude of the «Sovereign Lion». When he saw the poor Hind daring not drink in company with the other beasts at the «common watering place», he «bade her fear no more» and he protected the Hind from the rapacity of her companions. The Church of England is typified by the Panther, «sure the noblest next the Hind and fairest creature of the spotted kind». She also is hated, alone, and forsaken by the inhabitants of the wood and having quenched her thirst she staid for the Hind on purpose «to beguile by an hour of talk with the unspotted beast the tedious walk». Dryden says in the preface that for the first part consisting more of general characters and narration, he had endeavoured to «raise and give it the majestic turn of heroic poesy». There are, indeed, many passages in it of the highest beauty and pathos; the Protestant sects, especially the English Church are characterized exceedingly well.

The dialogue between the Hind and the Panther fills the second and the third part of the poem.

The second part contains «matters of dispute» as the real presence in the sacrament, the authority of popes and councils a. s. f.

The third part, says Dryden, «which has more of the nature of domestic conversation is, or ought to be, more free and familiar than the two former». It is most important in regard to our essay, because it is filled with allusions on different measures of ecclesiastical policy of James II.

The preface which has been written after the poem had been finished, is not to be overlooked almost as an important complement to the third part and we shall

not fail, therefore, to refer to it in the course of our exposition. —

To an attentive peruser the Fable of the Hind and the Panther seems to be more a political than a theological poem. The reader soon perceives that the allegory is not only and solely destined to form a defense of Catholic religion, that the author defends the Catholicism not because it is his own religion but because Catholicism is the religion of a political party, of the court-party and of the king. The court-poet is manifesting himself even as such a one in many passages. And, indeed, it cannot be expected that Dryden who, as his defender Johnson says (cf. life of the poets) did not pretend when he confessed himself a convert to „Popery“ to have received any new conviction of the fundamental doctrines of christianity, composed a poem of about one and a half thousand verses exclusively in order to prove himself nearly a zealous theologian. The totality of the poem has not merely the character of an apology of religion but also of a justification and support of royal plans concerning ecclesiastical policy. James aimed at a great thing, he strove for the complete liberty, even for the dominion of the Catholic Church which seemed to him the fittest basis of an absolute government. He did not disdain pains, money, illegalities, persuasion, and persecution to attain this aim. Corresponding to this proceeding no reason or demonstration, no praise or blame, nothing is omitted in Dryden's poem which seemed to be capable of producing an effect favorable to the policy of the king. James had the earnest wish to reconcile his people with the religion to which he belonged himself. He had the serious purpose to obtain for his Catholic subjects the same complete immunity from penalties, the same competences and benefits of the law which his subjects enjoyed belonging to the Established Church.

But the nation was filled with prejudices against Catholic doctrines and ceremonies, even to every member of the Catholic Church. — Dryden adopted his apology to this circumstance. He supports the ecclesiastical policy of his master in *every* regard. He justifies the purposes of James indirectly: he endeavours to show the verity of Catholic doctrines; he praises «his royal Majesty»; he extols James's character to the very skies; he defends the converts to Catholicism and attacks the Church of England; he outrages the sects and ridicules those Anglican divines and writers who defend their religion against the „ocean of Catholicism which proudly rising overlooks the land“ cf. 2126. — On the other side it is a direct defense of James' ecclesiastical policy when Dryden endeavours to justify those unconstitutional actions and measures by which the king made himself more and more unpopular. The poet defends the policy of James, inconsistent and unreasonable as it is, beyond the bounds of consequence and reason. — It is evident that it was the greatest service which Dryden would have rendered to the king's ecclesiastical policy if he really succeeded by the charm of his poetical lines and the power of his mighty satire to wipe away from the national mind those prejudices and enmities against Catholicism with which it was filled already since a hundred years. As for Quakers, Baptists, Independents, Jews a. s. f., there was nobody believing it necessary for the safety of the state to suppress them, but concerning „Papists“ the whole nation was of the same opinion: they were dangerous to the public weal. A deep distrust against Catholic doctrines and before all against Catholic moral principles had taken place everywhere: a circumstance that formed nearly insurmountable obstacles to the realization of James' plans. Dryden proves himself very well acquainted with his difficult task. The defence of Catholic doctrines occupies a prominent

place in the poem. The emblem of the Catholic Church is that of a milk-white Hind. Contrasting with the other beasts, spotted more or less, she only is «without unspotted, innocent within. (3.) She knows no sin (4) and though often forced to fly (7) and doomed to death (8) she still lives, for she is fated not to die. (8.) This allusion on the imperishableness of the Catholic Church is well corresponding with another passage of admirable poetical beauty. Towards the end of the second part the Hind invites the Panther «to be her guest that night», (1243) She needs not to fear the ferocious nature of such a dangerous guest, for

«she cannot die,

Till rolling time is lost in round eternity». (1313).

In the same manner the poet defends the authority of popes and councils (642 ss.), the necessity and importance of tradition (740 ss. 753 ss. 784 ss. 800—960) and before all the real presence in the sacrament, — that chief doctrine by refusing of which every high-churchman believed to be right. The following «marks of the Catholic Church from the Nicene creed» are seldom or never poetically paraphrased in lines of equal beauty:

«One in herself, not rent by schism, but sound,

Entire, one solid shining diamond:

Not sparkles shatter'd into sects like you:

One is the church and must be to be true:

One central principle of unity,

As undivided, so from errors free,

As one in faith, so one in sanctity.

Thus she and none but she —» (1098 ss.)

James could not but to be satisfied with such a favorable, charming description of a religion, destined by himself to become a religion by law established.

But the poet does more. Either out of loyal enthusiasm or by prudential consideration he praises his king's per-

sonal character nearly immoderately. It cannot, indeed, be denied that it was as necessary as difficult. From day to day James became more and more disliked in England. His antinational policy alienated him from the hearts of his Protestant subjects. The emblem of James is the Lion, the sovereign Lion. He is the protector of the milkwhite Hind and by his sovereign power she is «restrained from the rage of the other wild beasts». (27. For the Lion «more powerful and as vigilant as they, awfully forbids the prey. (304.) When he roars they stand aloof and tremble, for: «Much is their hunger, but their fear is more». (307.) The Lion is magnanimous and indulgent; he is not afraid of his enemies:

«So when the generous lion has in sight
His equal match, he rouses for the fight;
But when his foe lies prostrate on the plain,
He sheathes his paws, uncurls his angry mane,
And, pleased with bloodless honours of the day,
Walks over and disdains the inglorious prey.

So James, if great with less we may compare . . . (1561.) These lines fail not to produce a strange impression on everyone who is acquainted with the inhuman proceeding of the king against those who had taken part in the insurrection of Monmouth. During the «bloody assizes» in 1685 the Lord chief Justice Jeffreys hanged with James' consent and approbation at least 320 persons, men and women. Burnet (Bischof Burnet's Geschichte, die er selbst erlebt hat u. s. w. Hamburg und Leipzig. 1724. Aus dem Englischen von Mattheson I. 744) tells that the king took much pleasure in reporting to the foreign messengers at his court the details of the «campaign of Jeffreys», as he called that massacre. Dryden tries to convince the nation of James' mildness. «The king can forgive and love, his goodness at all times excelled the *godlike* race of the Stuarts.» (2094—95.)

The benefits of his «mildness» and of his «forgiving and loving» character seemed, however, not to be bestowed equally upon all his subjects. While the Whigs were prosecuted or forced, by hundreds, to live as refugees in Holland or elsewhere on the continent, the laws bore hard on Presbyterians, Independents and Baptists, all the special dispensations were granted to Catholics; they only enjoyed dignities, emoluments and privileges which belonged to the Church of England. Conforming the constitution, the king had a certain right of dispensation, but only in great restriction. If it had been permitted to James to dispense every dissenter with the exclusions and lawish punishments decreed on him since the time of queen Elizabeth, those laws had been inefficacious. But in regard to that great plan of complete equalization of Catholic Church, it was of great importance to James to obtain a lawful acknowledgment that he was in right to exempt some persons from the rigor of the laws. Not without some difficulty, by menaces and degradation of conscientious functionaries, he succeeded at length to find twelve judges who complied with deciding in his favor. Now he delayed no longer to bestow ecclesiastical benefits, on converts and to collate Catholics to high ecclesiastical functions. Dryden's task, to vindicate James' character was, you conceive, very difficult, if not impossible, so much the more as the poet himself was a convert both to the Church of Rome as to the court-party. Public opinion pointed at him as at a questionable character and it pointed no less at all the other converts, favored by the king. The indignation of the nation increased from day to day. The clergy did not cease from warning publicly of the «errors of popery» and a great numbers of pamphlets attacked or ridiculed Catholic doctrines and ceremonies together with Catholics and converts to Catholicism. Dryden endeavours to remove from the converts

that suspicion of self-interest which pressed them heavily with the whole weight of public opinion. He denies every profit which was said to spring out of a conversion to James' religion and party. «Now for my converts,» says the Hind «who you say unfed have followed me for miracles of bread: judge not by hearsay, but observe at least, if since their change their loaves have been increased.» (1515.) «The Lion buys no converts; if he did Beasts would be sold as fast as he could bid.» (1519.)

And concerning the poet himself and in general every convert we remark a beautiful passage which may be considered as a kind of history of conversion:

«My thoughtless youth was wing'd with vain desires,
My manhood, long mis-led by wandring fires,
Follow'd false lights and, when their glimpse was gone,
My pride struck out new sparkles of her own.
Such was J, such by nature still J am,
Be thine the glory, and be mine the shame:
Good life be now my task: my doubts are done!» (72 ss.)

In defending the conversions to the Church of Rome, the Catholic doctrines, the character and the person of King James, Dryden, we have tried to prove, did his best. This state of defense, however, did scarcely correspond with the character of the talented satirist. He often takes up offensive arms and throws sharp arrows against the Church of England, Presbyterians and in general against all Dissenters.

King Henry VIII is typified by a Lion, «old, obscene and furious made by lust». «She oppressed her mother in a shade; then by a left hand marriage weds the dame, covering adultery with a specious name.» (351.)

And, for the Church of England: The Panther is least deformed, because reformed the least; she is in doubtful points betwixt her different friends (the Protestant sects) (410 ss.). «Her novices are taught that

bread and wine are but the visible and outward sign» (417 ss.), — but nonsense never can be understood» (429). She wants «innate authority», for

«Who can she constrain them to obey

Who has herself cast off the lawful sway? (453).

As long as words a different sense will bear

And each may be his own interpreter

Our airy faith will no foundation find (463 ss.).

In comparison with assaults upon the Dissenters, the Church of England generally is spoken of with a certain precaution and respect. It had, indeed, been very imprudent to offend by a too sharp satire that great majority of the English nation belonging to the Established Church. It is also to be considered that the King, at least in the beginning of his reign, desired a common activity of the Churches of England and of Rome against Presbyterians and the other Puritan sectaries. While, therefore, the panther is called «the noblest next the Hind and fairest creature of the spotted Kind», — the Independent is typified by a «bloody Bear». «The bristled Baptist boar as impure as the atheistical buffoon Ape, but whitened with the foam of sanctity, fills the sacred place with fat pollutions.» The Presbyterians, as being more numerous than the other sects, are «more haughty than the rest»; that «wolfish race» is insatiate and appears with belly gaunt and famished face; never was so deformed a beast of grace» (160 ss.). Dryden did not neglect revenging the King to the best of his power on the Independants and Presbyterians for all the harm they had done to three generations of the house of Stuart. Upbraiding them with their crimes, he says:

«Your first essay was on your native laws:

Those having torn with ease and trampled down

Your fangs you fasten'd on the mitred crown

And freed from god your town» (200 ss.).

Then turning to another class of political and religious adversaries, Dryden attacks those Anglican divines who, in verses and in prose, did not cease defending their religion with the greatest eloquence, the more as they were sure of the sympathies of almost the whole nation. Nobody, indeed, could, in the course of time, be doubtful of James' religious desires. They came to light more and more. Catholic chapels and churches were seen to be built at many places; Franciscans, Carmelites, and Jesuits walking about in their robes astonished those who never had seen a Catholic cassock or a monk's habit. The practise of Catholic ceremonies agitated the population and caused tumultuary disturbances, especially at London. But the Anglican divines, adhering firmly to the principle of non-resistance, endeavoured to dissuade the people from defending (with open force) the rights of the Church of England. This doctrine of nonresistance is spoken of in 1433 ss.:

«You know my doctrine and J need not say,
J will not, but J cannot disobey.
On this firm principle J ever stood;
He of my sons who fails to make it good
By one rebellious act renounces to my blood.»

The „non-resistance“, as is well-known, is only relative to a defence with open force against authority by God established; but it gives free scope to every class of written apologies. King James kept, it is true, a strict hand over every literary work and his censure was sharp, above all his ecclesiastical censure. But the royal power being restricted by law did not reach over theological works approved by the archbishop of Canterbury. This privilege of the archbishop, certainly very annoying to James, is alluded to in 1055 ss:

«— Imprimatur, with a Chaplains name
Is here sufficient licence to defame.

What wonder is that black detraction thrives? a. s. f.

The English divines were indefatigable in defending their religion. Most of them were distinguished by the best erudition, by a most eminent eloquence; they all were excellent dialecticians and their style appeared to the best advantage if compared with the foreign idiom of some Catholic priests. The names of Tillotson, Sherlock and Stillingfleet will never be forgotten in England. They did not restrict themselves to attack «the erroneous and superstitious opinions of Papism», their pamphlets were filled with sharp and perspicuous personalities; they inquired into the biography of some converts to Catholicism who, indeed, for the most part were little honour to the Catholic Church. Dryden calls Stillingfleet the «grim logician». (1495.) He had, indeed, good reason to hate this excellent polemic writer who, as we have mentioned, had disarmed him, when he was charged by the king to defend, for the first in prose, the Catholic Church. It was, however, impossible to the poet who was but a perfidious apostate in the national opinion, to suspect and to ridicule honorable and celebrated men as Stillingfleet, Sherlock and Tillotson. Their publications did not cease to produce an immense effect upon the religious and political sentiments of every true high-church-man.

There are some passages in the poem of the Hind and the Panther having not yet been considered, in which mention is made of those measures of the king taken in order to abolish some civil disabilities, the penal laws, and the prerogatives of the Established Church. A short statement of the history of James' ecclesiastical policy and a further consideration of the passages in the poem, especially relative to that policy, will prove that Dryden is, indeed, a true interpreter of royal purposes and desires.

James made efforts to obtain for his Church a position completely independent among the different classes of Dissenters. But he conceived that, without strengthening

that inconsiderable number of Catholics by an alliance with any more numerous and more influential religious society he never would succeed. In the beginning of his reign he nurished the hope that the Church of England might be inclined, however, to regard the Catholic Church though not as a Church by law established or favoured, but at least as worthy of being exempted from lawful penalties and civil disabilities. And that hope was not unfounded. The Tory-party had accompanied his accession with loud marks of approbation; the parliament itself manifested the most loyal sentiments concerning his person and his family; it was earnestly ill-disposed towards every partaker of the bill of exclusion; it hated equally Presbyterians, Independants and Baptists; it condemned strongly the insurrection of Monmouth. Influenced by these considerations James thought himself powerful, even irresistible; he believed his popularity to be indestructible and he came, therefore, at last to the resolution: to enforce as far as could be done the penal-laws against the Puritan sects, to equalize by removing gradually every obstacle the Church of Rome to the Church of England, but to join both, if possible, by an amical alliance, to share between them the properties and revenues of the Established Church.

The Lion, studious of our common good
Desires (and king's desires are ill withstood)
To join our nations in a lasting love;
The bars betwixt are ease to remove

For sanguinary laws were never made above. (1969ss.)
The poem of the Hind and the Panther answers the royal intentions with the strongest exactness and, what is more, it answers the purposes of the king, when his policy had changed the course. From that we may easily infer that the tendency and the very contents of the poem are both inconsequent and fluctuating.

After having exposed those artificial arguments by adducing of which the hind vainly endeavoured to talk the panther out of her advantages and prerogatives, we shall refer to that important change of ecclesiastical policy of the court perceptible at the close of the poem and in its preface.

In the first, the second, and one half of the third part, the Panther — the Church of England — is treated with a certain prudence and precaution. The Panther is called the noblest next the Hind.

«How ſhould I praise, or blame, and not offend,

Or how divide the frailty from the friend?» (331 ss.)

The loyalty of the Church of England, proved in times of persecution, is praised in many passages:

«True to her king her principles are found!» (432 ss.)

«She chose her ruin and resign'd her life

In death undaunted as an Indian wife

O rare example!» (441 ss.)

The Hind invites the Panther «to be her guest to night.»

And then «she did not fail a full review to make»

«Of what the Panther suffered for her sake.

Her lost esteem, her truth, her loyal care

Her faith unshaken to an exil'd heir,

Her strength t'endure, her courage to defy

Her choice of honourable infamy». (1333 ss.)

Once the Church of England is even directly invited to join the Church of Rome:

«So might these walls, with your fair presence blest,

Become your dwelling-place of everlasting rest;

Not for a night or quick revolving year,

Welcome an owner, not a sojourner!» (1273 ss.)

In another manner Dryden discourses upon the Protestant Nonconformists. He endeavours to represent them as abominable as could be done.

The Hind calls to the remembrance of the Panther

that bloody government of the Puritan sectaries during the time of the common-wealth.

«As I remember, said the sober Hind,
Those toils were for your own dear self design'd
As well as me.» (590 ss.)

«However you take it now, the common cry
Then ran you down for your rank loyalty.» (595 ss.)

The Panther is hated as well as the Hind by those monsters: the bear, the boar and the wolf:

«To them the Hind and Panther are the same». (326.)

In such a manner the poet tries to dispose his countrymen for the Church of Rome and for an alliance of that Church with the Church of England against the Protestant Non-Conformists. But Dryden laboured, indeed, for nothing, if he could not succeed in persuading the English nation out of the faith in the utility of the test and the penal-laws against Catholics, out of the opinion that James by using without any restriction of his royal right of dispensation was guilty of an infringement of law. «I was always in some hope», we read in the preface, «that the Church of England might have been persuaded to have taken off the Penal-laws and the Test, which was one design of the poem when I proposed myself the writing of it.» Concerning the Test and the Penal-laws the English Church was of the opinion that they were the «banks to withstand the ocean (of Catholicism) which proudly rising overlooks the land.» (2125.)

«The first (conscience) commands me to maintain the crown, the last (interest) forbids to throw my barriers down; our Penal-laws no sons of yours admit, our test excludes your tribe from benefit.» (2121 ss.).

Dryden remonstrates with the defenders of those «barriers» on account of the circumstance that the Test excludes only Catholics while it puts no restriction upon the Nonconformists and every Atheist.

«But that unfaithful test unsound will pass
The dross of atheists and sectarian brass.»
Thus men ungodded may to places rise
And sects may be preferr'd without disguise.» (2032 ss.)
«No danger to the church or state from these
The Papist only has his writ of ease.» (2038 ss.)

Trusting in that well-known attachment of the Tory-party to the House of Stuarts and even to the person of James, Dryden calls the Test: «a sword forged by the foes of state against the sovereign Lord;»

«Design'd to hew th 'Imperial cedar down,
Defraud succession and dis-heir the crown.» (1996 ss.)
The poet appears well acquainted with the aversion of every true high-church-man against the Whig-party and he, therefore, continues:

«T'abhor the makers and their laws approve,
Is to hate traytors and the treason love.» (2000 s.)
The penal-laws are called: bloody comet-laws which hang
«blazing» over the head of every convert:
«My proselytes are struck with awful dread;
The respite they enjoy but only lent
The best they have to hope, protracted punishment.»
(1674 ss.)

But the Panther is inaccessible and inflexible concerning her «barriers». She knows them necessary to the public wealth:

«Think not my judgment leads me to comply
With laws unjust, but hard necessity:
Imperious need, which cannot be withstood
Makes ill authentick for a greater good.» (2129 ss.)
The Church of England could never be induced to consent, however, to an alliance with the Catholics against Dissenters, to yield a part of its prerogatives to a foreign Church. Then, James took another resolution. In 1685 he communicated to his parliament that he had dispensed

and appointed some persons who had not taken the Test-oath. From that moment the parliament, formerly most obedient and compliant to yield to royal purposes, became refractory and obstinate. James prorogued the Houses till February of the year 1686, then from February till May, from May till November. He took the resolution to govern without parliament, but he could not be doubtful of the feelings of the nation. That great party itself, the Anglican priesthood and the (Cavalier) gentry, every Tory and high-church-man, they all began to lose the confidence in the king. «I owe much», says the Panther, «to my gracious sovereign who would my vote implore to rescind the test, but I owe my conscience more. (2078 ss.) Perceiving thus that by trying fair and lawful means nothing was to be obtained for his Catholic subjects, James resolved to take another way. The king of England had the right or the prerogative to grant dispensations, but not without weighty reasons, to those individuals who were not allowed to hold a public office with regard to the religion they professed. That royal prerogative, however, had become questionable to a certain degree. In 1672, Charles II. had been forced by the Commons to annul his declaration for a general indulgence: he had been forced to declare publicly that his indulgence never should be drawn into precedent. And, indeed, if it had been permitted to a king of England to dispense all Dissenters with those disabilities and penalties decreed on them since the time of queen Elizabeth, those laws had been useless.

Now, James took the resolution to make use of the royal right of dispensation in favor of the Catholics. It was, therefore, of a great importance to him to obtain, however, a lawful acknowledgment that he was privileged to exempt some persons from the rigor of the laws. But to find judges who, sight of the precedent in 1672,

were willing to comply with passing a sentence in his favor, was a difficult task. By threats and by dismissing conscientious functionaries, he at length succeeded to join twelve members of Westminsterhall who decided that the king for important reasons of state, had the right to grant dispensations from civil disabilities to some single individuals. Having extorted this sentence, he did not delay bestowing without restriction ecclesiastical revenues on converts to his religion, to invest Catholics with high civil and military offices. This manner of proceeding was regarded by the whole nation as unconstitutional to the highest degree. Dryden is forced to concede the right of possessing church-revenues exclusively to members of the Church of England.

«The labour'd earth your pains have sow'd and till'd,
'Tis just you reap the products of the field.

Yours be the harvest, 'tis the beggars gain
To glean the fallings of the loaded wain.» (1394 ss.)

But he adjudicates the ownership to James:

«If Caesar to his own his hand extends

Say, which of yours his charity offends?» (1403 ss.)

Then adding appeasingly:

«You know he largely gives to more than are his
friends.

Are you defrauded when he feeds the poor?» (1405 ss.)

«My daily bread», says the Hind, «is literally implored!
I have no barns no granaries to hoard». (1401 ss.) Notwithstanding the Panther perseveres in her imbedding pertinacity.

«The Matron (hind) woo'd her kindness to the last —

But could not win; her (panther's) hour of grace was past.

Whom, thus persisting, when she could not bring

To leave the Wolf, and to believe her king

She gave her up —» (2186 ss.)

Certainly, this passage is corresponding with that important

change of James' ecclesiastical policy the first symptoms of which appeared in the beginning of the year 1687. James began to feel that he safely could not venture to plunder the Church of England and to outrage the Protestant Non-conformists, to offend, in fact, all his Protestant subjects at once. He had done his utmost in order to make the Church of England change its mind in favor of Catholicism. He saw that his efforts would always be useless. And no wonder! for Catholic principles had not been supported neither by numerous nor honourable men. Weakly defended, even often without any conviction, they did not in public opinion possess those conditions which made them worthy to be relied upon. James felt that his policy was forced to take another course, that he was forced abandoning the hope of a league between the Church of which he was a member and the Church of England. For this Church would never consent to repeal the laws against «Papists», to share rich revenues with converts, with «apostates». James exasperated the Protestant Non-conformists by bloody persecutions. On the other side he inflamed the enmity of the whole Tory-party because he plundered the Established Church.

Now he came to the resolution «to give up» his former «friends», intending, however, to persist in his favourite projects and to achieve them by other means. The Non-conformists in England and Scotland formed a numerous and respectable party. If James could succeed persuading them to identify the interests and wishes of the different sects with those of the Catholic Church, he was right to hope for a complete suppression of the Church of England and, in consequence, for a realization of his desires. Thus he had in view a general coalition including all those religious societies which did not share the advantages of the national Church. So strengthened

he could hope to overpower that mighty ecclesiastical society and to enrich his Catholic subjects at the expenses of Anglican church-revenues. He resolved to begin his new political campaign with granting a complete «liberty of conscience» to *all* his subjects. For Scotland a partial «toleration» was published already on the twelfth of February 1687. A declaration of general indulgence appeared in England on the fourth of April, of the same year. By this declaration were abolished: all disabilities concerning both civil and military offices, the penal-laws, and the famous test-oath; every constraint in the exercise of religion was forbidden and inhibited. This arbitrary and unconstitutional decree conferred on a sudden on all Non-Conformists, Catholic as well as Protestant, political, personal, and religious rights. There is, indeed, reason to believe that there was no better means to make forget those oppressed sects all the harm done to them since many a year, to win the affection of a numerous party, to dispose the most exasperate enemies of the Established Church for the royal policy.

This momentous change of James' policy is clearly perceptible at the close of the fable of the Hind and the Panther and in the preface, written after the poem had been finished. Dryden endeavours to justify James' declaration, though he certainly was persuaded that this «indulgence» was the most unlawful decree which ever had been published by the king since his accession. — Firstly we remark in the first part of the poem a passage of striking congruity of ideas of the Poet-laureate and the king. James repeats it nearly literally in his declaration:

«Of all the tyrannies on human kind
The worst is that which persecutes the mind,
Let us but weigh at what offence we strike
'Tis but because we cannot think alike.

In punishing of this, we overthrow

The laws of nations and of nature too.» (239 ss.)

At the close of his allegory Dryden «interwoves» two other allegories or, as he calls them, episodes or fables. The first (1714 ss.) narrated by the Panther, is a satire on Catholicism. As it is of little importance to the political tendency of the poem, we shall not refer to it. — The second fable (2200 ss.) is related by the Hind. James is represented by «a plain, good man» who, «inured to hardships from his early youth», took at last «possession of his just estate.» Near the house in which he lived, there was established «a sort of doves». These animals were degenerated and had become «voracious birds;» but «the bounteous owner, bound by promise, supports their cause, as «corporations» privileged by laws.» The doves are the emblem of the Church of England. The plain good man, James, had behind his house another farm wherein «his poor domestic poultry fed and from his pious hands received their bread:» in general all Dissenters, Catholic and Protestant. «Our pamper'd pigeons with malignant eyes beheld these inmates and their nurseries.» «But much they grieved to see so nigh their hall the bird that warn'd St. Peter of his fall»: the Church of Rome. The Test, this «law, the source of many future harms» is said to have «banished all the poultry from the farms». The plain good man had tried all «gentle means which might withdraw the effects of so unnatural a law;» but the pamper'd pigeons would not consent «to take it off.» After having alluded to bishop Burnet who is called the «captain of the Test», Dryden defends the declaration for liberty of conscience. He calls it a «doom of sacred strenght for every age to come». (2528). This decree, we are assured, does not at all contain an infringement of right, (2530) for the doves «as factious lawyers (2531) have adjudicated

to the king the right of dispensation; they themselves therewith have acknowledged that a king «can do no wrong» (2532). The Church of England possesses its «wealth and state» as before; but James has concluded in his «kingly breast» that the Non-Conformists, «the fowls of nature», too strongly were oppressed by the «doves.»

«He, therefore, makes all birds of every sect
Free of his farm, with promise to respect
Their several kinds alike and equally protect.
His gracious edict the same franchise yields
To all the wild increase of woods and fields,
And who in rocks aloof and who in steeples builds:
To crows the like impartial grace affords
And Choughs and Daws and such republicain birds:
«Secur'd with ample privelege to feed

But not to pass the pigeons rubicon.» (2538 ss.)

James expected much from his general dispensation; he hoped that every obstacle would give way before his power: «Here ends the reign of his pretended dove; 'Tis said, the Doves repented, tho' too late, become the smiths of their own foolish fate. Sunk in credit, they decreased in power.» (2550). — Therewith corresponding the High-Church is mentioned with very little respect — since the change of the tendency of the poem (2190). Dryden expresses himself in terms strongly contrasting with his former precaution in speaking of the Church of England. The Panther is the «fairest creature of the spotted kind,» but the doves are «voracious birds that hotly bill and breed and largely drink because on salt they feed,» (2244). They «lodge in habitations not their own (2252), for that house in which they live, was built long since for better birds.» (2250). The Church of England is suspected to have at all times simulated its loyalty to the king, for the doves:

«Like harpies they could scent a plenteous board;
Then to be sure they never fail'd their Lord,
The rest was form, and bare attendance paid,

«They drunk and eat and grudgingly obey'd.» (2254).

Puritans are set in the same category together with Catholics. They are that «poor domestic poultry.» By the «gracious edict» of the king they all «secur'd with ample privilege to feed, each has his district and his bounds decreed: combined in *common* interest with his own.» It is sufficiently cleared up by these expressions that James concerning Dissenters, completely had changed his manner of proceeding. It is still more plainly exposed in the preface: «This indulgence being granted to all the sects, it ought in reason to be expected that they should both receive it and receive it thankfully. For, at this time of day, to refuse the benefit and adhere to those whom they have esteem'd their persecutors, what is it else, but publickly to own that they suffered not before conscience sake, but only out of pride and obstinacy, to separate from a church for those impositions which they non judge may be lawfully obeyed? — will they at length to an Episcopal? If they go so far out of complaisance to their old enemies, methinks, a little reason persuade them to take another step and see wither that would lead them.» — Dryden reveals and supports the royal purposes in plain terms. He earnestly invites the Dissenters to «take another step,» to enter into a close connexion with the king in order to raise at the expense of their former persecutors, he calls upon those who till now had been the most despised class in England, to choose between liberty and slavery, between an alliance with Catholicism and the king — and an alliance with that Church by which they had been reduced to dependence, to slavery, to beggary since a hundred years. — But the Puritan sectaries, after a moment of

irresolution, disdained with few exceptions, the favours offered by James. The great body of Dissenters distrusted the words and promises of a king who, a few months ago, had driven to despair their families, who had persecuted to death men, women and children for their faith. — And as to Dryden himself the nation did not believe his flattering words. England distrusted the melodious numbers of an «apostate» who, for gain, had joined another religion after having composed, for gain, a mass of impure licentious dramas, fitted to inflame the obscene desires of the mob of the gallery.

Nevertheless we cannot but admire the genius of a poet who defended an unjust cause with such an eloquence and dexterity. The fable of the Hind and the Panther is surely both an excellent defence of James' unpopular policy and the best of those poetical productions which appeared in England during the last quarter of the 17th century. What pity is it that Dryden's eminent genius has not been destined by Providence to become under more favorable political and social conjunctures a true and victorious champion of suppressed liberty of conscience!

